

Washington State Gambling Commission

Raffles - Frequently Asked Questions



- I. General Raffle Questions
- II. Tickets and Sales Methods
- III. Prizes
- IV. Record Keeping
- V. Out-Of-State Raffles
- VI. Miscellaneous Questions

I. General Raffle Questions

1. Who can offer a raffle?

Only a bona fide charitable or nonprofit organization with a purpose that meets the criteria listed in [RCW 9.46.0209](#) is allowed to conduct raffles in Washington State. The organization must be organized and operating for at least 12 months before offering a raffle.

2. Can a private citizen or commercial business offer a raffle?

No, not even if they give the money raised to charity.

3. When do I need a license to hold a raffle?

- a. You must get a license if you are going to exceed these limits:
 - Offer more than two public raffles in a calendar year;
 - Gross revenue from the two unlicensed public raffles will exceed \$5,000 in a calendar year;
 - Gross revenue from unlicensed member only raffles will exceed \$5000 in a calendar year.

- b. You must get a license if you plan to:
 - Award firearms as a prize;
 - Conduct a joint raffle with another non-profit organization;
 - Give noncash incentives for selling tickets;
 - Sell discounted tickets;
 - Have someone other than a member of your organization sell tickets;
 - Choose winners using an alternative drawing format, such as a poker run.

When you apply for a license, you will need to prove your organization has:

- Made significant progress towards accomplishing its stated purpose during the 12 consecutive months before applying for a license; and
- At least 15 voting members who elect the governing body.

4. My organization does not have 15 board members, but we do have more than 15 members. Do we still qualify for a license?

Yes. The requirement is that 15 members of your organization must be eligible to elect your governing board. The size of the board is not the issue, but the number of voting members is.

5. My organization wants to conduct a raffle but it does not qualify for licensing because it does not have 15 members who elect the governing board. Can I conduct an unlicensed raffle instead?

Yes. You may conduct an unlicensed raffle if your charitable or nonprofit organization has been organized and operating for at least 12 months prior to the raffle and your by-laws or articles of incorporation state you are organized and operating only for purposes identified in [RCW 9.46.0209](#).

6. My organization already conducts weekly unlicensed drawings from among members. We would like to conduct a public raffle but are afraid we will exceed the \$5,000 gross receipts limit for unlicensed raffles. What should we do?

- You may collect up to \$5,000 gross receipts in a calendar year from an unlimited number of unlicensed members-only raffles.
- You are also allowed to collect up to \$5,000 from up to two unlicensed public raffles.
- Therefore, you may collect a total of \$10,000 from both types of unlicensed raffles, assuming you stay within the limitations of each type of raffle.
- To ensure you do not exceed the limit, only print \$5,000 worth of tickets.

7. Joint Raffles: Can several organizations join together and conduct a single raffle? Who needs to get the license? When don't we need a license to do this? Can we do this as an unlicensed activity?

[WAC 230-11-012](#) authorizes organizations to join together to conduct a raffle, as long as each organization obtains the proper licensing and the appropriate form for a joint event is submitted. One organization will be denoted as the "lead" in order to coordinate the raffle, and proceeds will be disbursed using a method agreed to by all participants.

You do not need to get a license if the organizations are considered "auxiliary" units. For example, if The Seattle VFW combines with the Tacoma VFW to conduct a joint raffle, a joint raffle application must be submitted. However, if the Ladies Auxiliary to the Seattle VFW wants to assist the Seattle VFW, no joint raffle application is required.

Joint raffles are only authorized for licensed raffles, not unlicensed raffles.

II. Tickets and sales methods

8. Can members sell tickets? Yes, members can sell tickets.

9. Can members purchase tickets?

- Yes, members can purchase tickets as long as procedures for safeguarding and drawing winning tickets are fully disclosed. If the raffle is conducted in an open manner, the public should be less likely to feel there was some sort of collusion or fraud involved, if a member happens to win a prize.

- If your organization chooses to limit purchases within your membership, be sure this information is disclosed to members so there will be no hard feelings or misunderstandings. You may also wish to print this information on your raffle ticket.

10. Can nonmembers sell raffle tickets?

- Yes, but only if you have a raffle license.
- Nonmembers can't be paid for selling tickets and must be supervised by a member. "Supervised" means there will be written procedures to document who is responsible for safeguarding raffle tickets and revenue. The member-supervisor will be required to pick up receipts from raffle ticket sales at least weekly.

11. Can nonmembers purchase tickets? Yes, at unlicensed and licensed public raffles.

12. Can minors sell raffle tickets?

Yes, but only if the organization is licensed and the minor is a member according to the by-laws of the organization and the organization's primary purpose is the development of youth. The organization must have at least three members or advisors who are at least 18 years of age who supervise the activity and one of the adult members or advisors must be designated as the manager of the activity, WAC 230-06-010.

13. Can minors purchase tickets? No.

14. Can I pay people to sell tickets? No.

15. Can I give incentives for selling tickets?

You cannot pay members or volunteers to sell tickets; however, if you have a raffle license, you may give noncash incentives to members or nonmembers for selling tickets if:

- Individual awards are non-cash;
- Awards are based only on the number of chances sold;
- The fair market value of the total amount awarded does not exceed 5% of the gross receipts for the raffle; and
- A record of the name, address, and telephone number is maintained for all persons receiving incentive awards.

16. Can I give away tickets? No.

17. Can I sell tickets on the Internet?

No. Selling tickets on the Internet would violate the federal wire wager act.

18. Can I accept credit cards for payment of raffle tickets? Yes.

19. Can I sell the tickets at a discounted price, for example, 50 cents each or 3/\$1?

Yes, if you have a raffle license and meet specific requirements (see WAC 230-11-025). The WAC includes specific requirements for printing and selling the tickets. Discounted tickets must NOT be offered in an unlicensed raffle.

20. Can I use a method other than drawing a ticket from a container to determine the winner of the prize?

Yes, if you are licensed and the method used meets certain criteria. See WAC [230-11-050](#), [230-11-055](#) for specific criteria.

21. What are examples of alternative drawing schemes for raffles?

Typical examples of alternative drawing schemes include duck races, paddle wheel raffles, and poker runs.

22. What is the minimum information that must be printed on the ticket?

Raffle tickets must have the following information: a consecutive number for each ticket, cost of each chance, date/time/location of drawing, name of the organization, description of prizes, and whether or not the person must be present at the drawing.

23. Can I use theater-style pre-printed tickets instead of printing up some specifically for my raffle?

Yes, but you must have all of the required information (see question above) disclosed on a flyer that will be given to each participant. The theater-style tickets must be the type in which the participant can record their name, address, and phone number on a detachable stub for the drawing.

III. Prizes

24. Can liquor be a raffle prize?

Yes, but only at members-only raffles (unlicensed or licensed) and you have to get a permit from the Liquor Control Board. Otherwise, liquor may not be offered as a prize in any gambling activity.

25. Can a firearm be a raffle prize?

Yes, but you must have a raffle license. If the firearm awarded is restricted from transfer by state or federal law, you must award the winner a certificate, redeemable by a licensed firearms dealer, for the prize (see related question below).

26. What if the person who wins a firearm is later found to have a criminal history which will prohibit him/her from owning a firearm?

This has turned up in some raffles and can cause some hard feelings on the part of the winner. We recommend that you place a disclaimer on the tickets with a statement to the effect that "Anyone deemed not eligible to possess a firearm due to failure to pass the National Instant Background Check System will be awarded an alternate prize of xxx." The alternate prize must be a value greater than the cost of the raffle ticket, but does not need to be equal to the value of the firearm.

27. Is there any limit on the value of a prize I can offer?

Yes. Any single prize may not exceed \$40,000 in value and no group of prizes during a 12-month period may exceed \$300,000. A written request to exceed the prize limit may be granted to an organization if there is good cause shown to the Commission. (WAC [230-11-065](#), [230-11-067](#))

28. When do we have to own the prize?

The organization must own the prize before the drawing date.

29. Can we enter into a contract to purchase the prize instead of purchasing the prize directly?

This could be done if there is an alternative prize offered to the winner. For example, if the grand prize is a car or cash, then a contract could be used to secure the car as a prize unless the winner decides to take the cash prize instead.

30. Can we offer a cash alternative to a merchandise prize? If so, do we still have to purchase the merchandise prize before the drawing?

Yes. See the answer to the question above.

31. What if we don't make enough money on the raffle to pay for the prize? Can we delay the drawing until we have as much money as we needed to raise for the raffle?

No. You must plan ahead and be realistic with your sales expectations to ensure your organization does not have a loss.

32. How do we choose the person to draw the winning ticket?

It is wise to choose an independent person who has no interest in the raffle outcome.

33. What if no one claims the prize?

The law has a term called "due diligence." This is the standard you should follow to show you made an honest effort to locate the winner. The greater the prize, the more due diligence you should be able to show. We suggest that you send a certified or return receipt letter to the address on the winning ticket. The letter should state that the winner must respond within a specific and reasonable time period in order to claim the prize. Placing an ad in the newspaper is another way to document your efforts to contact the winner.

34. What if the person says they don't want the prize?

You should issue a receipt to the winner to indicate they have made a charitable donation to the organization.

35. What if the winning ticket is not legible and we cannot determine the winner's identity?

It would be a good idea to state on the tickets that the participant must clearly print their name, address, and phone number to ensure they can be contacted if they are the winner. Also, ticket sellers should be properly trained to catch this problem at the point of sale to avoid this situation entirely.

IV. Record Keeping

36. What records must I keep?

It depends upon the size of the raffle.

- a. **Class A through D licensed raffles and unlicensed raffles** require a record of at least the following:

- Gross receipts;
 - Documentation of expenses;
 - Cost of prizes paid out; and
 - Documentation of how the proceeds were used.
- b. **Class E and above** require detailed records in standard forms supplied by the Gambling Commission.
Contact any field office or the headquarters in Lacey for copies of the forms.

37. How long do I have to keep raffle records?

- 3 years for licensed raffles; and
- 1 year for unlicensed raffles.

38. Where do I have to display the license?

At the location where the drawing will take place.

V. Out-Of-State Raffles

39. Can Washington state citizens participate in out-of-state raffles?

Yes. They can purchase tickets for raffles that are held out-of-state. Refer any questions or concerns regarding out-of-state raffles to the regulatory agency within the jurisdiction where the raffle drawing will be held.

40. Does a charitable or nonprofit organization (C/NP) need a Washington raffle license when the raffle will be held out-of-state?

The answer depends on how tickets will be sold in Washington. The C/NP will require a raffle license if they:

- Plan on selling tickets at events held in Washington; and
- The organization does not meet the requirements to operate an unlicensed raffle, [RCW 9.46.0315](#) and [9.46.0321](#).

If the C/NP plans on selling the tickets at events held in Washington and meets all of the qualifications for an unlicensed raffle as set out in [RCW 9.46.0315](#) and [9.46.0321](#), then a raffle license is not required.

If the C/NP is not actually selling tickets at events within the state and the only way citizens know about the raffle is through their association or membership in the organization, then no raffle license is needed. For example, a national organization holding a raffle in California with no tickets sales at events in Washington would not need a license.

41. Does a C/NP raffle licensee have to hold the actual drawing in Washington?

There is no RCW or WAC requirement for the drawing to be held in the state. [WAC's 230-11-095](#), [230-11-100](#), and [230-11-102](#) outline raffle records to be maintained by the licensee in Washington even when the drawing is held outside of the state. [WAC 230-11-015](#) outlines requirements for unlicensed raffles, which allow for us to approve an organization to keep their records out of the state.

VI. Miscellaneous Questions

42. Can my organization have a raffle and use the proceeds to benefit a local child who needs medical care or another similar good deed in the community?

Probably, but you need to be sure you have obtained specific approval from the Gambling Commission ([WAC 230-07-010](#)). The Commission will need to confirm that using the proceeds is in compliance with your organization's stated goals and purposes as set forth in your by-laws. Also, the Commission will require you to give the money directly to the purpose for which you intend it, not to the individual. In the example cited, the money would be given to the hospital, to a medical supply company for a wheelchair.

43. How long is a raffle license valid?

A raffle license is valid for one year, from the date it was issued.

44. What if I exceed my raffle license class?

Your raffle license class is based on the combined gross receipts during the license year. If you find you may exceed your license class, you should apply for an upgrade to the proper license class, pay the difference in licensing fee, and the upgrade fee. You must do this **BEFORE** you exceed the gross receipts listed on your license.

45. Do I have to pay gambling taxes to the local jurisdiction for my raffle?

It depends on where you live. Contact your county or city to find out if there is a tax on raffles in your area. [RCW 9.46.110](#) allows cities, counties or towns to tax raffles at a maximum rate of 5% of net receipts; the first \$10,000 cannot be taxed.

46. What is a 50/50 Raffle?

In a 50/50 raffle, 50% of the proceeds from ticket sales are awarded to one winner with the remaining 50% going to the charitable/ nonprofit organization operating the raffle. 50/50 raffles can be offered by both licensed and unlicensed organizations.